WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer-implemented method of managing documents related to a patent application, said method comprising:

storing a first workflow rule on a server system, wherein said first workflow rule causes, upon receipt of a first signal indicating a request to submit an invention disclosure for approval, the server system to generate a message that requests approval to prepare a patent application for said invention disclosure and route said message to a second client system;

storing a first invention disclosure in a database accessible by said server system;

receiving, at said server system, a first signal from a first client system indicating a request to submit said first invention disclosure for approval; and

executing said first workflow rule from said server system to generate a message requesting approval of a second client system to prepare a patent application from said first invention disclosure and to communicate said message to said second client system.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said message is an alert that, when read, allows said second client system to select to approve or disapprove preparation of a patent application for said invention disclosure and wherein after said second client system makes a selection, stores said selection in said database.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein if said second client system selects to approve preparation of said patent application, said server system generates a second message indicating said invention disclosure has been approved for preparation of a patent application.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein said second message is communicated to a third client system associated with a patent law firm.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein said server system includes an access management system that assigns client systems to one or more user groups and assigns data and documents stored in said database to one or more user groups, and wherein said access management system allows a client system connected to said server

5 system to access data and/or documents if the client system is assigned to the same

6 group as the data and/or document.

1 6.   The method of claim 5 wherein said first and second client

2 systems are associated with a first technology developer and assigned by said server

3 system to a first user group; said invention disclosure is part of a Case Data Unit

4 assigned to said first user group; said third client system is assigned to a second user

5 group different from said first user group; and, in response to said second client system

6 approving preparation of said patent application, said server system also assigns said

7 invention disclosure to said second group.

1 7.   The method of claim 6 wherein said first workflow rule is

2 defined by a work station associated with said first technology developer during a

3 customer set-up process.

1 8.   The method of claim 1 wherein said first client system sends said

2 first signal to said server system over the Internet.

1 9.   The method of claim 8 wherein said first client system uploads

2 said invention disclosure to said server system as part of the submission process.

1 10.   The method of claim 8 wherein said first client system creates

2 said invention disclosure under the guidance of Web pages generated by said server

3 system.

1 11.   The method of claim 1 wherein said message includes a link to

2 said first invention disclosure.

1 12.   The method of claim 11 wherein said message also includes at

2 least one other link to an electronic document relevant to said invention disclosure.

1 13.   A computer-implemented method of managing documents

2 related to a patent application, said method comprising:

3   storing a first workflow rule on a server system, wherein said first

4 workflow rule causes, upon receipt of a first signal indicating a request to submit a draft

5 patent application for approval, the server system to generate a message that requests

6 comments on said draft application and routes said message to a second client system;

7   storing a first draft patent application in a database accessible by said

8   server system;

9   receiving, at said server system, a first signal from a first client system

10   indicating a request to solicit comments on said draft patent application; and

11   executing said first workflow rule from said server system to generate a

12   message requesting comments on said draft patent application from a second client

13   system and communicate said message to said second client system.

1   14.   A server system for managing information related to patent

2   applications, said server system comprising:

3   (a)   a processor;

4   (b)   a database; and

5   (c)   a memory for storing a program;

6   wherein said processor is operative with said program to:

7   (i)   allow a first client system to set-up workflow rules that

8   define, for predetermined events, selected client systems for said server system to

9   transmit messages to;

10   (ii)   store, in said database, an invention disclosure submitted

11   by a second client system; and

12   (iii)   transmit a message to a third client system to indicate that

13   said invention disclosure has been stored in said database;

14   wherein one of said predetermined events for which a workflow rule is

15   defined is the submission of an invention disclosure by said second client system and

16   wherein said first client system defines said workflow rule to cause said server system

17   to transmit said message to said third client system.

1   15.   The server system of claim 14 wherein said first client system

2   and second client system are coupled over a local or wide area network.

1   16.   The server system of claim 14 wherein said processor is

2   operative with said program to further allow said third client system to store a patent

3   application corresponding to said invention disclosure in said database and, in response

4   to selection of a submit icon, submit electronically submit said patent application to an

5   patent office.

1   17.   The server system of claim 14 wherein said server system

2   receives communications from said first client system, said second client system and

3   said third client system over the Internet.